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TAGS: [SO](#) [CI](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [XB](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [VT](#)  
SUBJECT: CARITAS COMMITTED TO DPRK OPERATIONS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Peter G. Martin, POL/ECON CHIEF, VATICAN, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) The Holy See's aid and development agency, Caritas International, is committed to its programs in North Korea. Caritas South Korea has assumed control of the program from Caritas Hong Kong and is slowly overcoming transition problems. Since 1995, some US\$33 million has been spent on Caritas' DPRK projects which include feeding programs and capacity building for agriculture. DPRK officials have allowed Caritas to monitor its programs ensuring transparency. Donor fatigue has slowed up donations to Caritas appeals for North Korea. Caritas International is preparing for eventual reunification of the Korean peninsula. Caritas staff members are a good source of information on the general situation of the population in the DPRK.

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DPRK Programs by Koreans for Koreans  
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¶2. (C) Filipino Father Cesario Sanedrin, Caritas International (CI) officer in charge of Asia and Oceania (protect throughout), said despite difficulties with the transfer of operations from Caritas Hong Kong to Caritas South Korea (CSK), those in the DPRK who relied on Caritas aid "would not be abandoned." Sanedrin said that CI's operations in the DPRK had been the personal domain of former Caritas Hong Kong staffer, Kathi Zellweger. Zellweger now works in Pyongyang for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Her departure and the transfer of responsibility for CI's DPRK program to CSK threatened to scuttle operations in the north.

¶3. (C) Sanedrin said a recent change in the management at CSK had aggravated the situation regarding CI work in the DPRK. The former director had excellent contacts in the north and had overseen several projects. Also problematic was the lack of English-language skills among CSK staffers. Sanedrin said this precluded efficient communication with other international aid agencies and with CI headquarters at the Vatican. In an attempt to remedy the situation, CI has asked Caritas Germany to send an officer to CSK for a 6-month secondment. Further assistance to CSK will be discussed at an upcoming meeting in Brussels of Caritas officials from its European bureaus responsible for Asia. CI's head of International Cooperation is about to lead its annual mission to the DPRK, which should also help CI to move forward in the North. Even with the many challenges it faces in its transition, CI predicts greater acceptance of its

presence now since ethnic Koreans will have a greater role in its programs.

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Twinning Programs  
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¶4. (C) Running parallel to official CI operations in the DPRK are "twinning" programs undertaken by individual Catholic dioceses in South Korea. These initiatives target villages or regions in the north and undertake aid and development assistance. Other dioceses support the CI operations through fundraising, and pass on the cas to CSK headquarters in Seoul. Sanedrin provided us with documents indicting the international response to its fun-raising campaigns for the DPRK. In the period from July 1995 through September 2006 some US\$33 million was collected and disbursed for DPRK projects. Sanedrin added that international "donor fatigue" was fast becoming a problem. He cited the example of good media "PR" for the CI appeal for victims of the Christmas 2005 tsunami in Asia, but lamented that nothing of this sort exists for the DPRK where the lack of food security threatens millions of people.

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Monitoring Built into Aid Agreements  
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¶5. (C) We noted the recent decision by the UNDP to suspend operations in the DPRK because of the misappropriation of aid. When pressed about the possibility of DPRK authorities siphoning off aid money and food for its own purposes, Sanedrin told us that this was a major concern for CI. He noted that monitoring was built in to any CI project discussion with DPRK authorities. However, Sanedrin said that what is promised and what occurs are often two different things in the DPRK. On a positive note, he said that to date, CI's monitoring of its projects ensured transparency and the arrival of aid to the intended recipients.

¶6. (C) According to Sanedrin, CI's vision of a reunited Korean peninsula is the driving force behind its initiatives in the DPRK. Sanedrin said that the first Caritas food aid shipment

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reached North Korea in 1995. Now Caritas is in the process of shifting its involvement from humanitarian aid to more development-oriented support, or from a "band aid" approach to strengthening local livelihood and capacity. Programs include distribution of virus-free seed potatoes, teaching more efficient agricultural techniques, and providing heavy agricultural equipment like tractors. CI will continue its supplementary feeding programs for malnourished infants and pregnant women.

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) Caritas International's people on the ground and its annual visits to the DPRK provide a reliable source of information on the food security situation of the general population - as was demonstrated when Kathi Zellweger ran the operation. The change in project supervision management has resulted in an information hiatus which should soon be remedied with greater CI support for its fledgling South Korean team.  
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